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ABSTRACT

A 24-item questionnaire was mailed to 559 randomly selected secondary principals in Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma to determine the career status of secondary principals working in buildings with student populations of 400 or fewer. The greatest single factor influencing the decision to become a principal was need for increased salary. The largest group of respondents was in the 36-40 age bracket (22%), 27% had served 1-3 years as a secondary principal, and over 31% had taught 11 years or more. Salaries ranged from less than $18,000 to more than $33,000 depending on school size and principal's longevity. About 27% indicated a desire to stay in their present position for the duration of their career. About 39% reported no formal evaluation system was used to determine principals' employment status. Eighty-eight percent held one year contracts and vacation days differed widely. Based on the results, it is recommended that: salary and fringe benefits must be competitive with larger schools to get quality people; principals must be given greater autonomy within their buildings; multi-year contracts should be used unless prohibited by statute; and a formal evaluation system must be implemented for principals. (BRR)

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A RESEARCH REPORT

Career Status of Secondary Principals In Small Schools In The Southwest

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A RESEARCH REPORT

Career Status of Secondary Principals In Small Schools In The Southwest

In the states of Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma secondary school principals in small schools appear to be very concerned with the prospects of limited increased salaries, and fringe benefit packages. These data were gleaned from the results of a twenty-four item questionnaire mailed to 559 randomly selected secondary principals working in buildings with student populations of 400 or fewer. Do to the large sample size (10 per cent) and the high return rate (75 per cent) the results of this research should reflect, accurately, the career status of principals in small schools in the Southwest.

Secondary principals in small schools were asked, "What single factor influenced you most to become a principal?" The respondents indicated the need for increased salary (23 per cent), a desire to be in a leadership position (21 per cent), a desire to improve service to education (18 per cent), and increased prestige or social status (14 per cent). Additional reasons for entering the secondary principalship were encouraged by others (11 per cent) and career opportunity (10 per cent).

The questionnaire attempted to generate a profile of the individuals leading the small secondary schools in the four states studied. Item 1: What is your age? These data revealed that the largest group of respondents to be in the 36-40 age bracket (22 per cent) followed by the 31-35 age bracket (20 per cent).

TABLE II

AGE OF PRINCIPALS
(Percentages)
N=404

Age in Years	Arkansas	Colorado	N. Mexico	Oklahoma
26-30	3.8	.42	0	2.5
31-35	10.9	2.1	.42	7.1
36-40	9.7	3.8	1.3	6.8
41-45	7.6	4.2	1.3	5.9
46-50	6.3	4.6	1.3	3.8
50 +	6.8	2.5	.84	5.9

Item 2: How many years have you served as a secondary principal?

The largest percentage of principals (27 per cent) had served for 1-3 years as a secondary principal. Over 22 per cent of the respondents fell in the 4-6 year experience group. In this sample about 50 per cent of the respondents had six years or less of experience in the principalship.

TABLE II

YEARS EXPERIENCE AS A PRINCIPAL
(Percentages)
N=404

Years Experience	Arkansas	Colorado	N. Mexico	Oklahoma
1-3	12.9	4.9	1.9	7.4
4-6	7.4	4.2	2.2	8.4
6-9	5.2	3.5	2.5	4.9
10-12	3.5	2.7	.9	2.7
13-18	7.2	3.2	.5	5.7
19 +	3.0	1.7	0	2.2

Item 3: How many years did you serve as a classroom teacher? Over 31 per cent of the respondents indicated a teaching tenure of 11 years or more. The 7 to 10 year experience category produced a 28 per cent share of the principals teaching tenure and 25 per cent of the sample had served in the classroom from 4 to 6 years.

Item 4: What is the range of your annual salary? Over 48 per cent of the principals reported a salary of $24,000.00 or less with the largest group of principals, 22 per cent, earning between $21,000 and $24,000.00. Salaries ranged from less than $18,000 to more than $33,000 depending upon the school size and the principals longevity.

TABLE III

SALARIES FOR SECONDARY PRINCIPALS
(Percentages)
N=404

Dollars in Thousands	Arkansas	Colorado	N. Mexico	Oklahoma
Less than $18	1.5	.25	-	3.7
$18-$21	7.4	1.7	.25	11.9
$21-$24	9.2	2.9	.25	9.2
$24-$27	9.7	2.9	1.2	4.7
$27-$30	4.9	1.0	2.2	2.5
$30-$33	3.5	4.5	2.5	-
$33 & over	2.5	6.7	1.5	.74

Item 5: Which of the following fringe benefits does the Board of Education provide for you in addition to your salary? The most frequently reported fringe benefit was out of district travel allowance (22 per cent). The least reported fringe benefit was the use of a house or a housing allowance (4 per cent).

TABLE IV

FRINGE BENEFITS
(Percentages)
N=1026

Benefits	Arkansas	Colorado	N. Mexico	Oklahoma
In district travel	5.3	5.4	1.8	4.5
Out of district travel	8.0	5.5	2.2	5.8
Medical Ins.	4.9	7.0	3.0	3.4
Life Ins.	3.6	5.3	2.0	2.3
Liability Ins.	4.8	5.3	1.6	4.1
Housing Allow.	1.4	.97	.19	1.1
Salary Ins.	1.6	1.3	2.0	.09
Other	2.9	1.1	.29	1.1

Item 6: Check the item that best represents your present career status. About 27 per cent of the respondents indicated a desire to stay in their present position for the duration of their career. The reason most often cited for remaining in position was the communities ability to provide unique opportunities for the principal. Financial reasons due to a working spouse or outside business interests represents a second reason for maintaining their present position.

Almost 56 per cent of the respondents would be willing to move to a similar position in school administration if advancement was clearly indicated. Principals who were wanting administrative advancement selected the superintendency as their next work experience (32 per cent). About 15 per cent of these respondents wanted to pursue the principalship in a larger school.

Principals aspired to new positions because of increased salary (17 per cent), a desire to improve service to education (13 per cent), and personal achievement (11 per cent).

Over 16 per cent of the respondents indicated the desire to leave school administration. The factors that caused principals to consider leaving education were: need of increased income, desire to enter another field of work, and the desire to return to the classroom.

Item 7: Which of the following systems does your Board of Education prescribe for evaluating principals? About 39 per cent of the respondents indicated no formal evaluation system was being used to determine the principals employment status. A check list of items appears to be the most often used system of evaluation (26 per cent). About 21 per cent of principals in this study were evaluated against their job description. Goal setting in the form of task targets or management by objectives was cited by 12 per cent of the principals as the instruments used in evaluating administrative performance.

Item 8: What is the length of your contract? The vast majority respondents (88 per cent) indicated a contract length of one year. Only 10 per cent of the respondents revealed a contract with a length of 2 years or more.

Item 9: How many vacation days do you get during any one contract year? Vacation days differed widely among the respondents. Almost 26 per cent of the principals indicated vacation time as more than 20 working days plus all teacher vacation days during any one contract period.

TABLE V

VACATION DAYS
(Percentages)
N=366

Vacation Days	Arkansas	Colorado	N. Mexico	Oklahoma
20 days/year	4.6	3.3	.54	3.3
10 days/year	6.3	.81	1.6	6.3
20 days plus teacher vacation days	6.8	4.9	2.2	4.1
10 days plus teacher vacation days	7.1	.81	.54	10.4
More than 20 days	1.9	-	.27	3.0
More than 20 days plus teacher vacation days	12.8	7.9	3.3	4.6

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research report outlines the career status of secondary principals in the small schools in the Southwest. The changing career status of principals has as its roots many causes. If public schools are to attract and maintain quality people, the findings of this research should be of interest to the employing body in the local district. The following recommendations are the result of analyzing these research data:

1. Salary and fringe benefits must be competitive with larger schools if quality people are to attracted;
2. Principals must be given greater autonomy within their building;
3. Multi-year contracts should be used unless prohibited by statute;
4. A formal evaluation system must be implemented for principals; and
5. Selection of small school secondary school principals should be made on the basis of desire for a leadership position.